DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 352 287 SO 022 082

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TITLE Church-State Separation Under Fire. Third Annual Report on Church-State Conflict in the United States.
INSTITUTION Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, Silver Spring, MD.
PUB DATE 23 Sep 91
NOTE 23p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Church Role; *Constitutional Law; Elementary Secondary Education; Federal Government; *Government Role; National Surveys; Private School Aid; *Public Schools; Religion; *State Church Separation; State Government
IDENTIFIERS *First Amendment

ABSTRACT

This report provides an overview of church-state conflict incidents that occurred in the United States from September 1990 through August 1991. The report was compiled by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, an organization concerned with the potential erosion of the First Amendment's requirement of separation of church and state. The report lists incidents that were drawn from information provided by Americans United members, media accounts, and the action files of Americans United. The focus is at the state level; thus church-state incidents at the federal level are not included. A state-by-state survey of incidents is detailed identifying a total of 205 incidents in 45 states. The report categorizes church-state conflicts into four areas: religion in the public schools; state endorsement of religion; public funding of religious organizations; and free exercise disputes. (DB)

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CHURCH-STATE SEPARATION UNDER FIRE

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Americans United Third Annual Report on Church-State Conflict in the United States

September 23, 1991

SO 022 088

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Your voice in the battle to preserve religious liberty

INTRODUCTION

Americans United began informally tracking incidents of church-state conflict in the states three years ago. The organization was concerned that an erosion of support for the separation principle in the federal court system, Congress and the White House would have negative repercussions in the states.

This year's report, which shows an increasing number of church-state conflicts for the third straight year, indicates that widespread confusion over what the First Amendment's religious freedom guarantees mean continues. Attacks on separation of church and state originating at the federal level have spawned a plethora of church-state battles in the states. This report gives an indication of the problems looming in the future if the Supreme Court continues to retreat from the separation ideal.

Church-state incidents that flare up in local communities usually create a high degree of discord. Incidents often erupt that are downright ugly. This year's report, for example, lists a high number of disputes over displays of religious symbols on government property. Citizens who have protested these displays as clear violations of the First Amendment have been subjected to obscene phone calls and hate mail. Conflict over religion in public school creates similar community discord. In one Florida town, the children of parents who protested a teacher's religious activities in class were harassed by fellow students and called "devil worshippers."

In recent years, the Supreme Court has shown a disturbing willingness to defer to majoritarianism in religious issues. Religious majorities in given areas are permitted to choose what types of prayers and religious ceremonies will occur at public school ceremonies and civic events. This approach is fraught with difficulties. Not only is it insensitive to religious minorities, but it opens the door to sectarian warfare, especially in areas of the country where several religious denominations hold sway and none is dominant.

If the Supreme Court continues to follow this path--moving away from church-state separation and throwing issues such as school prayer and taxation for religious institutions back to the states, the types of incidents outlined in this report will only multiply.

This report covers the period of September 1990 through August 1991. Americans United does not present this report as a complete listing of all church-state conflicts in the country. Rather, it is intended as a overview of the field. The incidents listed are drawn from information provided by AU members, media accounts and the action files of Americans United. Since this report focuses on the states, church-state problems at the federal level are not included.

FINDINGS

All but five states registered at least one church-state problem in the period covered. Many states reported multiple incidents. California led the nation with 22 problems. New York was second with 16, followed by Illinois, 14, Pennsylvania, 13, and Texas, 12.

A total of 205 incidents in 45 states was reported. This is a modest increase over last year's total of 192 incidents in 46 states.

The report categorizes church-state conflicts into four areas:

- **Religion in the Public Schools:** Public schools have increasingly become a battleground for church-state warfare. Although the Supreme Court has repeatedly ruled that public schools should not promote religion, this principle is often violated by Religious Right groups seeking to "take over" schools. Sometime, school personnel themselves violate the ideal of religiously neutral public education. This category includes disputes over state-sponsored school prayer, prayers before commencement and sporting events, Bible distribution, religious proselytism, "creation science" and disputes over religious holidays.

- **State Endorsement of Religion:** The Constitution mandates that government at all levels remain neutral toward religion. Violations of this principle occur when government officials entangle themselves in religious matters. This category includes disputes over religious symbols on government property, state promotion of religious holidays, efforts to declare the United States a "Christian nation" and any entanglement between church and state.

- **Public Funding of Religious Organizations:** A longstanding principle mandates that religious groups must seek funding from voluntary contributions. They may not turn to the government to fund their projects, such as schools. Today this principle is being challenged by religious groups and critics of public education, who have urged government to fund private sectarian schools. The category includes funding for religious schools or other institutions through vouchers, tuition tax credits or deductions, textbook loans, transportation, large tax breaks, etc. It also includes other types of government handouts to religion, such as free property or renovations.

- **Free Exercise Disputes**: Last year, the U.S. Supreme Court modified the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment, making it easier for states to restrict religious freedom. This category includes incidents of state meddling in religious freedom through various mechanisms.

The state-by-state breakdown found the following results in each category:

Religion in Public Schools: 66 incidents in 29 states

State Endorsement of Religion: 66 incidents in 28 states

Public Funding of Religious Organizations: 48 incidents in 30 states

Free Exercise Disputes: 28 incidents in 18 states

STATE-BY-STATE SUMMARY

ALABAMA

★ A public elementary school principal in North Courtland came under fire for sponsoring daily devotionals over the school loudspeaker.

★ Parents complained after an elementary school teacher praised children who had attended church services, calling them angels, while rebuking students who had not gone to church, calling them devils.

★ Gov. Guy Hunt, an ordained minister, was criticized for using a state plane for transportation to religious services throughout the state. Hunt later agreed to reimburse the state.

★ A federal appeals court ruled that the University of Alabama can restrict an exercise physiology professor who proselytized in class and taught creationism.

★ Officials with the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources agreed to change guidelines governing the use of chapels in state parks to avoid a church-state lawsuit.

ALASKA

★ Gov. Walter Hickel, an advocate of education vouchers, asked the state Board of Education to resign, replacing them with pro-voucher appointees.

ARIZONA

★ A pro-voucher group launched a campaign to put a voucher referendum question on the 1992 ballot.

ARKANSAS

★ A businessman in Springdale formed a group to lobby Gov. Bill Clinton for a voucher plan.

★ A federal appeals court struck down on-campus Bible classes in the Gravette public schools. After the Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal, local education officials dropped the case.

CALIFORNIA

★ A federal court ordered the city of Tehachapi to remove a floral cross in a public cemetery.

★ Los Angeles officials considered instituting a ban on animal sacrifice.

★ A San Diego atheist activist was arrested after protesting prayers before a County Board of Supervisors meeting.

★ San Francisco officials allowed a menorah to be erected at Union Square.

★ A federal judge ordered Beverly Hills officials to remove a 28-foot high menorah that had been erected in a public park near City Hall.

★ Municipal officials in Monterey were ordered by a federal judge to dismantle a creche that had been displayed on the City Hall lawn.

★ A voucher plan was introduced in the state Senate and assembly but failed.

- ★ Officials with the California Department of Transportation discontinued a plan to distribute prayer cards to illegal aliens (warning them of highway dangers) after complaints on church-state grounds.

- ★ Parents in Moreno Valley protested a public school math teacher's religious discussions in class.

- ★ The American Family Association sued the Woodland Joint unified School district over the district's use of the "Impressions" reading series.

- ★ Two members of the Sweetwater Union High School District in San Diego questioned the board president's practice of opening meetings with prayer.

- ★ A federal court in San Francisco upheld the use of federally funded vans at parochial schools but limited their use.

- ★ The California Supreme Court banned state-sponsored prayers at public school graduation ceremonies.

- ★ A Mission Viejo public high school science teacher sued his school district after officials told him to stop teaching creationism in class.

- ★ A federal appeals court ruled that San Bernardino County cannot own a theme park containing only religious statues.

- ★ Officials at Grossmont Union High School agreed to grant recognition to a student Bible club to settle a lawsuit.

- ★ The yearbook advisor at Buena Park Junior High School was suspended after he surreptitiously inserted biblical passages into the yearbook.

- ★ Gilroy city councilwoman Sara Nelson came under fire for supporting a proclamation urging city employees to read the Bible.

- ★ An orthodox Jewish group in San Francisco sued over the right to hold services in a private home.

- ★ Church-state activists in San Francisco filed suit challenging the city's ownership of a 103-foot cross atop Mt. Davidson.

- ★ San Diego residents filed suit against a 43-foot city-maintained cross atop Mt. Soledad.

- ★ The ACLU challenged the display of a 35-foot cross on public property atop Mt. Helix in San Diego County as well as the use of a cross on the municipal symbol of La Mesa.

COLORADO

- ★ The Glenwood Springs City Council voted 5-2 to remove a 20-foot cross from public property.
- ★ A pro-voucher group launched a drive to amend the state constitution to allow for parochial school aid.
- ★ A federal appellate court upheld a ruling barring a Lakewood elementary school teacher from displaying religious books and posters in class.
- ★ Students at a Colorado Springs high school sued school officials, seeking permission to distribute religious literature on campus.
- ★ The Colorado Supreme Court ruled that a minister has the right to use a "treatment by spiritual means" defense in a child abuse case.
- ★ Four members of the state House objected to a resolution authorizing a day of prayer, saying it could offend some residents.
- ★ Police in Denver criticized a program that allowed volunteer clergy to ride with officers.
- ★ Police in Colorado Springs agreed new regulations regarding street preachers to settle a lawsuit.
- ★ Denver residents challenged the display of a Ten Commandments monument on the statehouse grounds.

CONNECTICUT

- ★ A Roman Catholic priest in Shelton tried to stop a public school from sponsoring a health fair because Planned Parenthood wanted to participate.
- ★ Ezra Academy, a Jewish institution, received $300,000 through a state-run charity program.
- ★ Parochial school parents protested at the state capital when Gov. Lowell Weicker, saying the state faced financial crisis, sought to remove private school aid subsidies from the state budget.
- ★ Lawmakers passed a bill rescinding a state statute making adultery a criminal offense.

★ A public school teacher unsuccessfully sued the Ansonia School District, seeking extra days off for religious leave.

★ School officials in Middletown ordered coaches to drop pre-game prayers after church-state concerns were raised.

★ The Clinton Board of Education drew up guidelines covering the use of religious music in class.

DELAWARE

★ The Delaware Supreme Court upheld a state law allowing parents to choose spiritual healing over conventional medical treatment for children.

★ Former Gov. Pierre "Pete" duPont began lobbying the state legislature to pass a voucher plan.

FLORIDA

★ A Fernandina Beach couple successfully sued the Nassau County School Board to stop a fifth grade teacher's religious activities in class.

★ Officials in Lake Worth backed away from their plans to sponsor an Italian street festival with religious elements after church-state concerns were raised.

★ A student at Tarpon Springs High School sued the school, seeking permission to distribute a religious newspaper on campus.

★ Boca Raton officials allowed a Jewish group to display a menorah in a city park to avoid a lawsuit.

★ The parent of an elementary school student in Wewahitchka sought unsuccessfully to have the child removed from the class of a teacher who read the Bible to students.

★ A federal judge upheld a Clearwater ordinance requiring religious groups that solicit donations to register with the city.

★ Legislators rejected an effort to set up a tuition voucher plan, but a new pro-voucher move, spearheaded by President Bush's son, Jeb, was soon launched.

★ The school board of Lake County rejected a proposal to teach "creation science" in public schools.

GEORGIA

★ A federal court ruled that a Jewish group had no right to display a menorah on the grounds of the state Capitol.

★ A DeKalb County judge lifted a ban on religious literature distribution at Stone Mountain Park.

HAWAII

★ A federal appeals court upheld the state's designation of Good Friday as a legal holiday.

IDAHO

★ School officials in Burley agreed to stop holding graduation ceremonies in a Mormon church after some parents complained.

★ Officials in Boise's public school system discontinued allowing the Gideons to distribute Bibles after parents complained.

ILLINOIS

★ A federal appeals court ruled that the town of Crestwood could not sponsor a Roman Catholic mass as part of an outdoor festival.

★ Chicago's O'Hare Airport does not have to allow a Jewish group to display a menorah, a federal appeals court ruled.

★ A federal appeals court ruled that the New Lenox public schools could order a teacher to stop teaching "creation science" in class.

★ A public school student in Wauconda has the right to distribute a religious newspaper, a federal judge ruled.

★ About 500 students in a Downers Grove public school walked out of class after school officials decided not to erect a Christmas tree. The school later put up the tree.

★ A public high school track coach in Charleston agreed to drop a "Christian pledge" for athletes after a Jewish student complained.

- ★ The school board of Morton Community United School District 709 approved a policy mandating that students must be told about "creation science" if they are taught evolution.

- ★ A federal judge dismissed a lawsuit challenging recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools because of its religious content.

- ★ A Cook County Court refused to allow a pro-voucher group to intervene in a lawsuit challenging the state's method of funding public schools.

- ★ A federal appeals court ruled that the city seals of Zion and Rolling Meadows, which contain religious symbols, violate the First Amendment.

- ★ State Sen. Walter Dudycz introduced a tuition voucher plan.

- ★ A federal appellate court ruled that the city of Ottawa could not sponsor religious devotional art in a public park.

- ★ A parent complained over a class assignment in Grayslake High School that required students in a literature course to write a first-person story about a pact with the devil.

- ★ Rockford public schools instituted a policy to handle celebration of religious holidays in schools.

INDIANA

- ★ The state superintendent of public instruction announced a push for a voucher plan.

- ★ The St. Joseph County Board of Commissioners adopted a formula, drawn up by local clergy, governing the display of religious symbols at the County-City Building.

- ★ Residents of Highland pressed their challenge against the display of a 16-foot crucifix in city-owned Wicker Park.

- ★ A business group called COMMIT pushed a voucher plan, but state lawmakers rejected the proposal.

- ★ The school board in Parker City voted to cancel a living Nativity scene scheduled for the local elementary school after the ACLU objected.

- ★ A federal judge rebuked two U.S. prosecutors, saying they had subpoenaed too much information from a Gary Catholic Church while attempting to get to the bottom of a bingo scandal.

★ A federal judge approved a plan for Gideon Bible distribution in a Rensselaer public elementary school.

IOWA

★ The Iowa Supreme Court ruled that a Cedar Rapids church must pay state excise taxes on non-religious consumer goods.

★ Officials in Polk County investigated allegations of religious favoritism and harassment in the Information Services Department after employees complained that improper religious activities were occurring during work hours.

★ The Albert City-Truesdale School Board voted 4-1 to keep the story "Dita's Story" in the curriculum. Parents alleged it promotes witchcraft.

KANSAS

★ A state representative introduced a tuition tax deduction plan.

★ The ACLU challenged the display of a Ten Commandments monument in front of a courthouse in Kansas City.

KENTUCKY

★ Voters approved a ballot referendum question granting broadly based property tax exemptions to churches.

★ Catholic parents sued the state Department of Education, seeking free public school summer school classes. A state judge ruled in favor of the parents.

★ A former high school choir member sued the principal of Moore High School in Louisville after she was required to perform during a church service to receive full academic credit.

★ A coalition of religious groups urged the state Supreme Court to strike down an anti-sodomy law, saying it promotes the moral views of some religious groups.

LOUISIANA

★ Three public education groups filed suit in federal court challenging the state's decision to include religious schools in a funding program.

★ A state representative introduced a bill to set up an experimental voucher system in Orleans Parish.

★ The state Attorney General's office issued an opinion stating that distribution of Gideon Bibles in public schools violates the Constitution.

★ Public school officials in Bossier Parish set up a "repository" for religious literature distribution.

★ Attorney General William Guste ruled that graduation prayers are permissible in the state's public schools.

MAINE

No incidents reported.

MARYLAND

★ Public school officials in Montgomery County decided to cancel busing service to two parochial schools rather than extend the service to all non-public schools.

MASSACHUSETTS

★ The state Supreme Judicial Court ruled that historic preservation officials in Boston can not restrict design changes inside houses of worship.

★ Competent adults may refuse life-saving medical treatment on religious grounds, but the right does not extend to children, the state Supreme Judicial Court ruled.

★ Gov. William Weld told Catholic officials that he wants to work with them to find a way to extend state aid to parochial schools.

★ A state representative introduced a bill to ban "religious satire."

★ Roman Catholic Cardinal Bernard Law attacked Gov. William Weld's attempt to liberalize the state's Sunday closing law.

★ Town selectmen in Easthampton refused to sign a proclamation acknowledging the 150th anniversary of Williston Northhampton School until religious references in the document were removed.

MICHIGAN

★ A federal judge upheld the city of Clawson's display of a Nativity scene at City Hall, saying it was only one component of a larger display.

★ A federal judge ruled issued an injunction barring Grand Rapids officials from allowing the display of a menorah at the city square.

★ A group called TEACH Michigan kicked off a plan to amend the state constitution remove the ban on aid to religious schools.

★ Local judges in Clinton and Newaygo counties came under fire for interjecting their religious views into courtroom proceedings.

★ Education officials in Galien and Berrien Springs barred a substitute teacher from the districts after he distributed religious literature to students.

★ Education officials in Grand Rapids agreed to give early bus transportation to parochial school students even though the schools began classes before public schools.

MINNESOTA

★ The Minnesota Court of Appeals ruled that teachers at a Maplewood Catholic high school could not form a union.

★ Residents of Chanhassen failed in their bid to stop construction of a Temple of Eck, a pyramid-shaped facility for adherents of the religion Eckankar.

★ Jewish leaders in St. Paul questioned the city's decision to use public funds to erect a Christmas display containing a "holiday tree."

★ Lawmakers consider a bill that would remove legal protections for parents who rely on "spiritual healing or prayer" rather than medicine to treat sick minors.

★ A state court ruled that the First Amendment does not shield churches from damage awards in cases involving clergy misconduct.

MISSISSIPPI

No incidents reported.

MISSOURI

★ Three state representatives introduced an amendment designed to change the state constitution to permit vouchers.

★ Several parents of students at Bonner Springs junior and senior high schools complained about an assembly with religious overtones that occurred at the school.

MONTANA

No incidents reported.

NEBRASKA

★ A proposal to enact a tuition tax deduction plan was defeated in the unicameral legislature by one vote.

★ A Religious Right legal aid group sued eight small school districts over their use of a self-help curriculum called Quest that some parents said promotes "humanism and Eastern mysticism."

NEVADA

No incidents reported.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

- A coalition of public school and civil liberties groups filed suit in state court to block Epsom's plan giving tax abatements to those who pay private school tuition. The court struck down the plan.
- A resident of Swanzey promoted a property tax kickback scheme for parochial school patrons.
- Portsmouth officials agreed to place a voucher scheme on the November ballot.

NEW JERSEY

- A federal appeals court approved the New Jersey Port Authority's ban on solicitations by religious groups in airports.
- A student at East Brunswick High School sued school officials after they refused to grant recognition to her Bible club.
- The state House and Senate approved a bill that appropriated $10 million to fund medical services in parochial schools.
- Hunterdon County's Board of Social Services canceled an annual employee Christmas lunch that contained religious overtones after some employees complained.
- Point Pleasant officials dropped a ban on evangelism and leaflet distribution to head off a lawsuit.
- The Prospect Park City Council voted to scrap the city's restrictive Sunday "blue law" rather than face a lawsuit.
- Parochial school parents in Lakewood complained about the length of the routes of the free bus service they receive from public schools.

NEW MEXICO

- The state American Legion dropped a mandatory religious oath taken by students who attend a summer Boy's State program after one participant sued.
- The city attorney of Santa Fe ruled that a Ten Commandments monument in a city park could remain, despite protests from citizens.

NEW YORK

- ★ The state Board of Regents narrowly voted down a voucher proposal put forth by Vice Chancellor Carlos Carballada.

- ★ AIDS activists in New York City sued Health Department officials to force them to order Catholic-run AIDS nursing homes to provide information about condoms, safe sex and abortion.

- ★ A federal appeals court ruled that a stadium in Nassau County could not ban religious literature distribution on the grounds.

- ★ The New York City Board of Education approved a plan for condom distribution in high schools, over the objections of several religious groups.

- ★ A report by the Committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty showed that the cost of providing services to the state's private schools has risen dramatically.

- ★ Eight crosses atop the Albion courthouse were removed after residents complained.

- ★ Catholic officials asked the Board of Regents to set up a voucher "experiment" in New York City.

- ★ The Aquinas Institute, a Catholic school in Rochester that has been designated a historic landmark, received $300,000 from the state for a restoration project.

- ★ Officials at Letchworth Central School in Gainesville agreed to stop sponsoring a baccalaureate service in the wake of church-state concerns.

- ★ Tioga County High School officials canceled a baccalaureate service after consulting with the school's lawyer.

- ★ A federal judge ruled that the Center Moriches School District does not have to rent its school building to religious groups.

- ★ The state Court of Appeals ruled that a state regulation requiring public school districts to include representation from religious groups on state-mandated AIDS advisory council does not violate church-state separation.

- ★ A Jewish congregation in Great Neck sued after village officials agreed to grant them a building permit only if the congregation accepted restrictions on certain religious activities.

★ Orthodox Jews in the newly created village of Airmont sued municipal officials after zoning regulations were passed banning small synagogues in homes.

★ A federal judge dismissed a lawsuit filed by a Syracuse man who protested a program with religious content operating in a public housing project.

★ The Buffalo Public School District agreed to allow students at McKinley High School to form a Bible group to settle a lawsuit.

NORTH CAROLINA

★ School officials in New Hanover County agreed to examine the relationship between the schools and a church committee that sponsors Bible classes in the schools.

★ A Baptist evangelist sponsored a week-long crusade in Ashe County public schools.

★ Education officials in Guilford County formed a Choice in Schools Commission to hold hearings on choice plans.

★ A federal appeals court heard the appeal of a Mecklenburg County judge who was ordered to stop opening his sessions with prayers.

★ Corrections Secretary Aaron J. Johnson announced a plan to "lead inmates to Christ" through a prison ministry program.

NORTH DAKOTA

★ After the state supreme court upheld North Dakota's Sunday closing law, the legislature repealed it.

OHIO

★ The state's Catholic bishops issued a pastoral message seeking more state aid for parochial schools.

★ Gov. George V. Voinovich pushed a tuition tax deduction measure he had promoted during his campaign.

★ A federal judge declared a Cincinnati city square an open forum and ordered city officials to allow the display of a menorah.

★ The Ohio Supreme Court dismissed a claim of "clergy malpractice" lodged against a Knox County pastor accused of sexual misconduct.

★ The American Family Association filed a lawsuit against public school officials in Willard over the school's use of the "Impressions" reading series but later dropped the case.

OKLAHOMA

★ The parents of a Norman fifth grader sued after school officials told the child to stop reading religious literature and harassing other children about religion during recess. The case was settled out of court.

OREGON

★ Eugene Mayor Jeff Miller promised to make sure no city money was spent promoting a municipal prayer breakfast after the ACLU raised concerns.

★ The Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal from a bankrupt couple who were told they could not exclude a monthly tithe from disposable income as they attempted to pay off their debts.

★ Education officials in Sweet Home approved a plan allowing students to distribute permission slips for released-time religious education.

★ In Eugene, residents filed suit to have a concrete cross removed from atop Skinner Butte.

PENNSYLVANIA

★ Two Philadelphia-area public school districts voted to discontinue graduation prayers in a bid to settle lawsuits.

★ City officials in Bethlehem debated the legality of erecting a creche at City Hall.

★ Pittsburgh Mayor Sophie Masloff, trying to defuse longstanding bickering over religious symbols at City Hall, arranged to have the displays erected across the street on private property.

★ A federal judge rejected a lawsuit by the ACLU seeking to remove small crosses from a Christmas tree at the state capitol building.

- ★ State lawmakers rejected a voucher plan, but House backers promised to reintroduce it.

- ★ Public school teachers in Philadelphia were ordered to stop wearing religious garb after a federal appeals court upheld a state law forbidding distinctive religious clothing in public schools.

- ★ In the middle of measles outbreak in Philadelphia, a family court judge issued an order that would have required city officials to identify all religious bodies in the city that believe in faith healing. The order was later rescinded.

- ★ A group of public school students in Philadelphia sued Central High School officials after school officials ordered a gospel choir to drop its school employee director.

- ★ Public school officials in Allentown filed a lawsuit in federal court, challenging regulations stipulating that the district pay for educating troubled juveniles sent to a sectarian school.

- ★ A federal judge ruled that the Pittsburgh School Board must allow a religious group to rent school property.

- ★ A public school student in suburban Philadelphia successfully sued his school to win the right to distribute religious literature on campus.

- ★ Officials with the Fishing Creek Elementary School in New Cumberland canceled Halloween celebrations over fears of "satanism."

- ★ Bucks County officials decided to not erect a creche at the courthouse.

RHODE ISLAND

- ★ A dispute over the legality of prayers during public school graduation exercises in Providence reached the U.S. Supreme Court.

SOUTH CAROLINA

- ★ A state representative introduced a voucher plan.

SOUTH DAKOTA

- ★ Parents in Sioux Falls banded together to keep the "Impressions" reading series in public schools after local fundamentalists charged that the books promote witchcraft.

TENNESSEE

★ The McMinn County School Board voted 5-1 to eliminate Bible classes from elementary schools to avoid a threatened lawsuit.

TEXAS

★ Bishop Rene Gracida told police officers in Corpus Christi that Catholic law forbids them from arresting anti-abortion protestors who attempt to block abortion clinics.

★ A federal court said the city of Austin may continue to display a Christian cross on its municipal seal.

★ A state representative introduced a voucher plan.

★ The state Board of Education, over objections from religious groups, approved biology textbooks that contain information about evolution.

★ Voters in Corpus Christi rejected a "human life amendment" to the city charter that would have declared that life begins at conception.

★ A Pharr woman sued the local school district after it refused to admit her 4-year-old son because of his long hair. The woman said she made a "promise to God" never to cut the boy's hair if he survived a bout with cancer.

★ A member of the Duncanville High School girls' basketball team sued school officials for allowing pre-game prayers and other religious observances in school.

★ Officials with the Alcoholic Beverage Commission tried unsuccessfully to ban a beer from Louisiana called Dixie Blackened Voodoo Lager, saying the label promotes "the occult."

★ An Arlington woman protested the inclusion of prayers at City Council meetings.

★ A Religious Right legal aid group sued Dallas officials, charging that local zoning laws make it difficult for churches to open schools.

★ A San Antonio resident filed suit over a religious sculpture erected at a city-owned park.

★ A federal appeals court ruled that an Austin woman's rights were violated when a Travis County judge imprisoned her after she refused to take a juror's oath ending in, "So help me, God."

UTAH

- ★ Lawmakers approved a plan that allows state scholarship money to go to church-affiliated colleges.
- ★ The Utah Supreme Court ruled that a family cannot be automatically disqualified from adopting solely because it leads a polygamous lifestyle.
- ★ Logan officials removed a drawing of a Mormon temple from the city seal after a lawsuit forced the town of St. George to remove a similar temple from its seal.

VERMONT

- ★ A federal judge ruled that a Jewish group could not erect a large menorah in front of the Burlington City Hall.

VIRGINIA

- ★ The Virginia Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the city of Lynchburg could not issue tax-free industrial development bonds on behalf of the Rev. Jerry Falwell's Liberty University.
- ★ Parochial school parents unsuccessfully pressured the legislature to pass a law giving free busing to private school students.
- ★ The Albemarle County School Board voted to cancel a religion-based sex education program operating in several public schools as an alternative to state-mandated sex education classes.
- ★ Taxpayers protested the Virginia Beach City Council's plan to issue $10 million in tax-free industrial revenue bonds to Pat Robertson's Regent University.

WASHINGTON

- ★ A federal court ruled that the Equal Access Act does not apply to Washington because it violates the state constitution.
- ★ A parents' group in Walla Walla threatened to sue the school district unless the "Impressions" readers were removed.

★ A Seattle church asked the Washington Supreme Court to strike down the city's historic preservation law, which the church said gives municipal officials too much power over houses of worship.

WEST VIRGINIA

No incidents reported.

WISCONSIN

★ An education study commission recommended expanding Milwaukee's controversial private school "choice" plan.

★ An atheist group asked Wauwatosa officials to remove a cross from the city seal.

★ A Waunakee couple protested the display of a creche at the village park.

WYOMING

★ Education officials in Big Horn County canceled graduation prayers and other ceremonies after the ACLU threatened legal action.

★ The ACLU threatened to file a lawsuit over the hiring policies of the Big Horn County public schools, charging that Mormons have received preferential treatment in staff hirings.